

CRITICS IN SENATE ASK RUSK TO TELL OF PLANS FOR WAR

He Asserts Administration
Weighs 'All Alternatives'
but Will Say No More

'SETBACKS' CONCEDED

But Secretary Testifies U.S.
Regains Initiative—To Be
Heard Again Today

Excerpts from Rusk testimony
are printed on Page 16.

By JOHN W. FINNEY
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WASHINGTON, March 11 — The Senate Foreign Relations Committee pressed Secretary of State Dean Rusk today to disclose whether the Administration was planning to expand the war in Vietnam.

The Secretary, however, would go no further than the statement that the Administration was re-examining its policy from "A to Z" and considering "all alternatives."

Among the alternatives, Mr. Rusk indicated, is an increase in the American military strength in Vietnam.

In a day-long, nationally televised defense of Administration policy, Mr. Rusk acknowledged that the United States and South Vietnam had suffered some "serious setbacks" in the recent enemy offensive.

He contended, however, that the military picture was becoming more encouraging because the United States and its allies were "returning to the initiative."

Sees 'Turning Point' in War

The war, he declared, has reached a significant "turning point," with the outcome dependent upon which side most quickly seizes and retains the initiative.

At the same time he cautioned that heavy fighting lay ahead, fighting that would test the will and determination of the United States.

Mr. Rusk found the committee, which has long been critical of the Administration's policy, turning toward direct opposition to the war.

There was talk of holding up the foreign aid bill—the ostensible subject of the hearing—until the committee received some satisfactory answers on the future course of the war. It was Mr. Rusk's first public discussion of Vietnam policy before the committee in two years, and he came well prepared for what the Administration had expected to be a political

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ical confrontation at a critical time of decision.

For some six hours, under glaring television lights, Mr. Rusk defended Administration policy before a committee that was generally hostile and a crowd that sometimes jeered.

The confrontation, however, appeared to be inconclusive.

For the most part Mr. Rusk reiterated often-stated arguments, sometimes repeating almost verbatim statements he had made in speeches and Congressional testimony.

Perhaps the most significant point to emerge from the hearings was the decided swing in opinion within the committee against the Administration's Vietnam policy.

In the hearings with Mr. Rusk two years ago, the committee majority tended to be critical but unwilling to come out in open opposition to the policy.

But today Stuart Symington, Democrat of Missouri, and Clifford P. Case, Republican of New Jersey, openly condemned the Administration's policy as sterile and contrary to American interests. Two years ago Mr. Symington and Mr. Case questioned, but did not oppose, American policy.

'War or W.P.A. Project?

And Senator Karl E. Mundt, Republican of South Dakota, long a supporter of Administration policy, voiced reservations today. Protesting that the Administration was failing to give sufficient priority to the war or to present a convincing case for it, Senator Mundt asked at one point: "Is it a war or a W.P.A. project?"

Mr. Rusk had hoped would be a one-day confrontation before the television cameras threatened to turn into a prolonged argument between the Administration and the committee.

At the end of the day, some of the Senators, including J. W. Fulbright, the committee chairman, had not had time to question Mr. Rusk. As a result, after some testy exchanges with Senator Fulbright, Mr. Rusk agreed to reappear before the committee tomorrow morning.

In the background at the hearing were reports, frequently referred to by the Senators, that the Administration was considering sending as many as 206,000 additional troops to Vietnam. Senator Fulbright said of the reports: "I have no reason to doubt them."

But Mr. Rusk persistently refused to discuss them or even tell the committee that Congress would be consulted before any decision was reached to send additional troops to Vietnam.

Says Policy Is Reviewed

Largely as a result of the evening's test, or lunar new year, offensive, Mr. Rusk said, the entire situation is under consideration from 'A' to 'Z.'

But he said that he was assured by President Johnson yesterday that the President had "not made any fresh decisions or come to any new conclusions."

Only in general terms did Mr. Rusk discuss the nature of the current reassessment.

Among the aspects being reviewed, he said, were the status of the enemy forces, which he said had been badly damaged in the Tet offensive; the status of the pacification program, which he admitted had been set back; the buildup of South Vietnamese forces, of which he expressed encouragement, and the possible military contribution of other allies.

Mr. Rusk described the current situation as "serious" but "not hopeless."

There is "going to be some hard fighting ahead," he said, and it is "going to test us to the limit." But there are "grounds for encouragement," he said, since the allied side was "re-capturing the initiative" ahead of the enemy.

Asked at one point by Senator John Sherman Cooper, Republican of Kentucky, whether the Administration was considering the alternative of de-escalation and a negotiated end to the war, Mr. Rusk said that "all alternatives" were being considered.

But at the end of the day of testimony, Senator Cooper observed: "Your emphasis seems to be on a military solution."

Mr. Rusk was careful not to foreclose the possibility of an additional troop commitment.

Nor did he foreclose the possibility that the war might be expanded into North Vietnam.

Asked by Senator Albert Gore, Democrat of Tennessee, what effect an invasion of North Vietnam would have upon the nation's balance of payments, Mr. Rusk refused to answer on the ground that the question should not be discussed in public session.

"Surely we have demonstrated that we are not itching to invade anyone," Mr. Rusk said. He then went on to observe that "it has been our hope that we can bring it to a close without a geographical expansion of the war."

At the start of the day, after Mr. Rusk completed his statement on foreign aid, Senator Fulbright introduced the Vietnam issue by describing the Administration's policy in Vietnam as "wrong and nothing short of disastrous."

In reply Mr. Rusk began to speak of "organizing the peace,"

asserting that this country must demonstrate that aggression cannot succeed.

Senator Fulbright cut him off, however, with the observation that "there is no question about organizing the peace but great differences on how it should be done."

Some Senators, such as John F. Sparkman, Democrat of Alabama, Bourke B. Hickenlooper, Republican of Iowa, and Frank J. Lausche, Democrat of Ohio, came to the defense of Mr. Rusk and the Administration.

But the questioning from other Senators was generally critical, and the hostility to Administration policy seemed to rise as the day wore on.

Sits With Bowed Head

As the criticism mounted, Mr. Rusk sat with his head bowed, to protect his eyes against the strong lights, and fingered a paper clip instead of his customary cigar.

The Secretary seemed visibly shaken when the Senate Democratic leader, Mike Mansfield, observed that "a feeling of unrest, frustration and uneasiness, to put it mildly," was building up in the Senate and the country at large over the Administration's Vietnam policy.

Senator Mansfield criticized the bombing of North Vietnam, which he contended had failed in its military and political objectives, and criticized the Administration for not pursuing more forcefully various proposals that had been made for negotiations.

Repeatedly Mr. Rusk took the position that North Vietnam was not interested in serious negotiations and would accept no settlement that did not give it South Vietnam.

Senator Wayne Morse, Democrat of Oregon, delivered a 10-minute "question" in which he accused the Administration and its supporters on Capitol Hill of engaging in "a snow job" to "cover up the provocation" committed by the United States in 1964 by sending American destroyers into the Gulf of Tonkin at the same time South Vietnamese PT boats, supplied and trained by the United States, were bombarding North Vietnamese positions.

In reply, Mr. Rusk insisted that there was no provocation and that the destroyers had every right to conduct the patrol off North Vietnamese shores.

Corruption Charged

Senator Frank Church, Democrat of Idaho, protested that the United States was being driven into a position of supporting a South Vietnamese Government in which there was a "general pattern of corruption and draft-dodging." The observation brought an approving cheer from the youthful audience standing in the back of the caucus room.

Mr. Rusk acknowledged that there was "too much corruption" and said that the United States was "pressing" the Saigon Government to remove it. But, he said, "the national security should not turn on the fact that a frail individual didn't do his duty in every case."

Senator Case suggested that there was a growing feeling in the country, which he shared, that the present course was "leading to nothing but the destruction of South Vietnam."

Mr. Rusk replied that to abandon the present course would be "catastrophic."

Asked by Senator Fulbright why it would be "catastrophic," Mr. Rusk explained that an American withdrawal would demonstrate to "Asian Communism" that it could expand through wars of national liberation.

Several times Mr. Rusk contended that it was directly in the interest of the national security of the United States to stop the threat of "militant Communism" in Southeast Asia.

If not stopped, he suggested, it would "change the world balance of power against us."